

“Our Place in Politics”

Rom. 13:1-7

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I don't know that I've ever preached a sermon before where I truly didn't know where to begin. I don't know of anything in our culture today that brings:

- more heated discussion...
- more immediate separation into different camps...
- more division than the subject we are going to deal with in today's message.

But, we have to deal with it. There is no way we could preach a biblical worldview series and not touch on this, and if you want to know where the title of this series came from – *Chasing Sanity* – it came from knowing I was going to jump in the deep end of this subject today.

I watch the news. I listen to the pundits...and both sides make me feel like I'm going crazy. We really are Chasing Sanity.

I've titled this message: **Our Place in Politics**

I thought a good place to begin today just to prove this was really an issue we needed to discuss I did some research this week and pulled some random screenshots from members of Champion Forest social media pages from over the past year, and I want to show them to you.

TOTALLY JOKING! Ha! Just some levity to start off here. Let me just say, if you got nervous, you may need this message today! Ha! Some of you got really excited and some of you got really tense!

Okay...let me outline for us where we are headed with all this, and we'll begin to work our way through it. First, I want us to establish today that politics is a part of life and as Christians, we have a part to play in it – and not just a part to play in it, but I believe we'll see from scripture we have a divine responsibility and role as it relates to politics.

Second, I want to talk about what our divine role and responsibility is...to what degree are we to engage in politics.

And then finally I want to talk about, and this may be the most important as it relates to what we experience today and that is I want to talk about HOW we engage in politics as followers of Jesus.

So, let's get started and let's begin by zooming out and we'll see that before politics EVER came along, government was established.

Now, if you do any brief study of theology or the character of God, you'll learn very quickly that God is a God of order – and that's important! Don't miss this! God is a God of order – NOT chaos.

Just read Genesis chapter one. The creation account is an orderly account of creation. Six days, God works and creates and the seventh day, he rests. It's all done in an orderly fashion.

Now, just a side note here. I don't know if you've noticed this or not in our *Chasing Sanity* series, but nearly every week, we've gone back and looked at Gen. 1-3. It's been our starting point nearly EVERY week of this series!

If you take away Genesis 1-3, and specific to that the fact that:

- God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them...
- God created man and woman in his image, in his likeness...
- Sin entered the world through the free will of man and therefore all of mankind has fallen because we have this fallen nature IN US...sin as we discussed in week two of this series effects EVERYTHING! It's thrown mankind and even nature into chaos.

You take Gen. 1-3 away and what we learn in these three chapters about creation, man and sin and you destroy our ability to have to and hold to a biblical worldview - and don't think for a minute that Satan doesn't know this!

This is why you do the work and study it, but ALL competing worldviews do their VERY best to redefine, eliminate or excuse these three chapters in Genesis.

- Atheism – there is no Creator God...there's no God at all...
- Humanism – you can achieve ultimate happiness and anything else for that matter without God or religion...
- Postmodernism – there's no absolute truth...what is true for me – what I believe in the Bible, is not necessarily true for you...

Study any "ism", and you'll see the outright rejection or proposed elimination of Gen. 1-3. These chapters inform us on EVERYTHING from the problem of pain, evil and suffering, to sanctity of life, to race to biblical sexuality as we will see next week AND to the realm of politics we are looking at this week.

God is a God of order. We see this in creation. We also see this in the first institution he created – the family. It too is created and established to function in an orderly way.

In the home Adam is to be the leader. His wife, Eve is to be his helper. And they have dominion (there's established order) over all of creation.

We read later in the New Testament (Eph. 5) more about this order, how the man is to be the head of the home. The wife is to voluntarily come under his leadership and children are to be obedient to their fathers and mothers. What is God doing? He is establishing order.

We see order in creation. We see order in the home. We see order in the establishment of the Church:

- We read in (Eph. 4) "that God gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers" to equip the saints for the work of ministry.
- We read in 1 Cor. 12 that the Church operates much like a physical body (one member with many parts, but all working together in an orderly fashion).

There are the two ordinances in the Church – that of the Lord's Supper and baptism. Two offices – Deacons and Pastors...all of this set up so that there is order in the Church.

God is a God of order, and this is where the need for government came. There was a need for order in society. God has given us government for our good. Because man has a fallen nature, left to themselves it would be anarchy.

We don't have time today to go into detail on the history of God establishing government. For the Hebrew nation, it was a theocracy. God was the head of the government.

And this situation was of course unique to the people of Israel because of this special covenant they shared. He gave them the Law...the Ten Commandments - they served as the parameters...the boundaries...they were the guiding moral principles on how to interact first with God and then with one another.

For much of Israel's history and world history for that matter a monarchy form of government was in place. Just read 1&2 Kings and 1&2 Chronicles.

We've gotten a hint of what this form of government looks like...playing out right before our eyes this week with the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and the proclamation of King Charles III. It's a hereditary monarch!

Now, it's important to know that the Bible never puts forward or suggests what kind of government is best. There are certainly biblical principles we could apply to try and determine it and debate about it.

As Americans, we certainly lean toward and love this idea that the best form of government rule is a democracy that is the rule of the people, for the people, and by the people.

What the Bible does tell is that whatever government we are living under, it has been established by God, is for our good and we are to honor its authority.

Now, as we get going here, I am going to read a passage of scripture from Romans 13, and there are three main points you will see come right out of this text about government.

I will give them to you right up front here so you can look for them as we read.

- 1. Governing authority is placed by God**
- 2. Governing authority should promote good**
- 3. Governing authority should punish bad**

Romans 13:1-7 – “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

Now, important to remember Paul is writing this in 57 AD. The Emperor at the time is Nero and his focus was not on the citizens of Rome, I assure you! Instead like every Emperor, his focus and desire was on expanding his rule...strengthening his Empire...consolidating his power.

And it's in this context Paul writes about how government is established and what our role and responsibility is living within that government. We've seen the basis for government in these verses:

- what it's FOR (God's order and divine placement for our benefit)...
- HOW should it operate (promote good and punish bad)...

We also see what our role and responsibility within the government we've been placed under is...and as we transition into the second part of this message, I'm going to give you three sets of words to help us think through this.

These are our roles and responsibilities...our responses as Christians living under the governmental authority we have been placed under.

- 1. Submit and Obey**

The ONLY responsibility given to those under authority in Romans 13 is to be subject to it! Not to, is to incur judgment (v. 2). We honor God's order when we respect the authority he has placed us under by submitting and obeying it. Peter will write the same:

1 Peter 2:13-17 – “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

Now, we Americans don't like this submit and obey stuff! Afterall, rebellion is in our DNA...not just in our sin nature, but there is a reason it was called the American Revolution!

We can't do a deep dive into this, but the moral argument CAN be made that a tyrannical government is really no government at all and just like our forefathers did, sometimes as a LAST RESORT – and that's key - you take up the people in your care cause because the government in place isn't.

Really, the ONLY time according to scripture that we are not to submit to the legitimate governing authority we have been placed under is if asked to do something that is contrary to God's Word - this is where we Acts 5:29 draw a line in the sand so to speak, and say “we must obey God rather than man.”

We can NEVER honor and come under authority that demands we dishonor Jesus and/or disobey his word.

2. Pray and Preach

We are commanded in scripture to pray for those we are in authority under. Now, I understand there are some of you praying for those you are under to change and change soon, and you can of course pray for that. The call of scripture though is to pray for those you are currently under!

1 Tim. 2:1-3 – “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior...”

We are to pray for our governing officials:

- That God would grant this wisdom and strength...
- That they would rule and govern in righteousness and with justice...
- That God would put people around them with sound judgment and skillful experience.

And just remember here that God is sovereign and in control. Daniel 2:21 teaches us that He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings. Psalm 75:7 – “God executes judgment putting down one and lifting up another”. Don’t let who is in power give you heartburn.

We are to pray. I wonder if we spent as much time praying for our officials as we did complaining or trying to replace or keep them in office, what kind of officials we would have! Our lack of prayer is an indictment on all of us.

We are also to preach! One of our first responsibilities and major priorities as Christ-followers is to proclaim his gospel. Disciple-making is what should define us! Jesus and his way of living (death to self, loving others) is who we lobby for!

His Kingdom rule and reign on earth SHOULD be our main concern and main priority. I’m not saying what happens in the political realm is not important, I’m just saying if:

- If you find yourself advocating for a certain political candidate or party more than you advocate for Jesus and his Church, there may be some misplaced priorities in your life...
- If you are giving more to a political party than you do the Kingdom, that alone reveals where your heart and passion lies...
- If you spend more time listening to Fox News or CNN or listening to talk radio than you do reading your Bible, that’s a problem because you are being disciplined by the wrong voices...
- If you find your identity more in being red or blue or with an elephant or a donkey instead of as a new creation in Christ, then a step back needs to be taken...

A ballot or office change without a heart-change equals no change! Let’s not forget the mandate Jesus gave when he left this earth. It was NOT about preserving the culture (which we will get to in just a minute), it was about evangelism and discipleship.

Matt. 28:18-20 – “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We are to submit and obey...we are to pray and preach. And then thirdly, we are:

3. Influence and Advocate

Now, our role of government as noted is a democracy. And because of this, we as citizens of the United States have a voice in our government. We GET TO participate, which is an honor...a privilege.

Illus. Sept. 11 Weekend – We remember those who lost their lives 21 years ago today to terrorists. Part of the government’s role and responsibility in promoting good and punishing bad is to protect its citizens. I’m so grateful for those that have fought to preserve the freedoms we have as a country...those that have defended us both home and abroad. It’s a great reminder of our military ministry (explain).

As citizens of a free country, we have certain rights and privileges. Again, part of that is we get to participate in our government. And that participation is where politics comes in.

Politics as defined by *Oxford Languages* – **Politics - the activities associated with the governance of a country or other area, especially the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power.**

Now, within “the activities associated with governance”, I see from scripture two main ways we are to work as Christians living in our society and culture, and that is as mentioned to: influence and advocate.

Let’s talk about influence first. I can’t think about influence without thinking of Matthew 5. Jesus is speaking at the Sermon on the Mount about being citizens of the Kingdom. And that’s important to understand – we hold a dual citizenship!

Yes, we are citizens of the United States, but we are also MORE importantly, and I use that word “MORE” there purposefully, because the Kingdom of God is MORE important. MORE importantly, we are “citizens of heaven”.

Phil. 3:20 – “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...”

There is nothing wrong with being a patriot. Patriotism and love for country is a good thing. We ought to all be patriots! But like many good things our love for country can become an idol if it becomes our FIRST and ONLY thing!

America is exceptional...in its founding...in the ideals we have stood for and embraced over time. It’s exceptional for sure, but it’s not superior.

We as Americans are not superior to other people from other countries. And any idea of a proposed superiority that Christian Americans are God’s chosen people and the only true Americans is a worldview you don’t want to be a part of.

As Christians, we can’t put our love for country OR anything else for that matter above our love and devotion to God! Our Kingdom citizenship is the priority.

And as a citizen of the Kingdom we are told in **Matt. 5:13-16** – **“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.**

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

In a word, as citizens of the Kingdom of God living also as citizens of the United States, we are to INFLUENCE people for Christ - this is what it means to be salt and light.

Salt in the times of the Bible was mainly used as a preservative. There was no refrigeration and so people would take salt and rub it into meat or fish and it would preserve it...keep it from rotting or wasting away.

The parallel of course is that as Kingdom citizens, we ARE to be salt – and as salt we preserve society from the decay of sin.

As followers of Jesus and citizens of his Kingdom, we should not be contributing to the decay of this world – that kind of salt according to the scripture, has lost its taste...it’s a sure sign something is wrong if salt is not doing what it was created to do – preserve!

It's the same with light. Light by its very nature is meant to be displayed! Light shines! Both salt and light speak of influence.

Salt preserves decay. Light shines and exposes darkness. THIS is how we should be living in our society...as salt and light.

Now, we influence people via our witness...THROUGH our good works, but in talking about politics today, let’s specifically talk about influencing people in that vein.

I want to encourage two actions today. First, we need godly people to run for public office. I’m talking about EVERY avenue of every public office in every branch of our government: from the local school boards to the county levels to the state and national offices, we NEED people who fear God to be in places of power so they know what to do with that power after they have received it!

That word “salt” in Matt. 5 is in its plural form...that means influencing culture and society is ALL of our jobs!

And listen, I know that sometimes doing the right thing like running for office or being in any kind of leadership as a Christian in a public setting can be thankless:

- I know it can be dirty...
- I know it can be lonely...
- I know it can be tough...

But this is a role and responsibility that we have been given, and to whom much is given much is required!

And I'm just praying today that somehow God would use this message to influence someone or 2, 3, or 4 or 5 someone's to run for public office or take that position as head of the PTO or HOA or whatever it may be and use your power to point people to Jesus and influence for good!

And just know that as you make the decision by faith to jump into the public arena your church is here to support you, encourage you and pray for you!

The second action I am calling for today is to vote! The voice of the Church should be loud and clear in our culture. And I can just tell you this as your Pastor...we haven't been through an election season together yet...

And so, let me just tell you in this moment what you can expect from me. First, you heard me say that if you get into the political arena, your church will be here to support, encourage and pray for you...and we will!

But you need to know the ONLY person you are EVER going to hear me propagate for and endorse from this pulpit is the person of Jesus Christ!

Now, if someone visits our church and they hold a local, state or public office, I will recognize them out of honor for the office and ask you as a church to pray for them, and I will preach the gospel to them!

I WILL also do what I'm doing today and that is encourage you to vote! And next week just so you know in application to this message we will be registering people to vote.

This is a call to action today! As citizens of this country, we have the privilege to speak via the ballot box and we shouldn't take that responsibility lightly. VOTE.

And while I'll NEVER tell you how to vote, I will tell you that our vote should reflect biblical values and exactly what we are talking about in this series – it should reflect a biblical worldview. This is just part of what it means to be an influence in our culture specifically as it relates to the political realm.

But the second word is: Advocate

We may not all run for office, but we CAN advocate for people and programs that make a difference in people's lives and make a difference in the community in which we live.

One of the passages our preaching team through around when we were discussing this topic and how we were going to approach it was Jeremiah 29.

If you're not familiar with the context, the people of Israel are exiled. They are living in an unfamiliar land and Jeremiah breaks the news to them that they are going to be there for a while. And do you know what he tells them to do?

Jer. 29:4-7 – “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

In other words, make this home that's not really your home feel more like home. And what Jeremiah said is, “Don't sit on your hands waiting for deliverance...”

In our time, we could say, let's not just isolate ourselves in our homes and insulate ourselves in our churches and wait for Jesus to return. Instead, we are to get to work! Build homes...build families...seek the welfare of the city. Do good where you live while you live!

And listen, Christians historically...they have done just that! Talk about advocating and specifically advocating for the down and out...the lost and lonely...the hurting and neglected.

Listen to how **Dionysius**, the Bishop of Alexandria describes believers in the 3rd century: **“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy: for they were infected by their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many in nursing and curing others transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead...”**

Think about this: Red Cross, Ivy League Schools, Boy Scouts, Hospitals, Salvation Army, YMCA, Prison Reform, AA, the Civil Rights movement all started because of Christians decided to influence and advocate on behalf of those who needed it the most.

As we talked a bit about last week, we are to stand up for and advocate for truth, righteousness and justice.

Part of that advocacy may mean speaking for those who have no voice. It may mean peacefully protesting under the rights we have as citizens...getting into “good trouble” as Congressman John Lewis called it.

As Christians living under our government in a way that honors Jesus means:

- We are to submit and obey.
- We pray and preach.
- And we are to influence and advocate.

And let me close with simply a pastoral word to all of us...and that is about HOW we do these things, especially the last three: preach, influence and advocate – HOW we do this in our day and time is extremely important.

Within the Church, we can't allow politics to divide us. While biblical values are pretty much straightforward and spelled out in scripture, how we are to deal with certain issues that arise in our culture and how we implement what we believe the Bible says isn't always as clear.

For example, we are all aware and know we should meet the needs of the poor – scripture clearly demands this! However, Christians can differ on the best ways to do this. Sometimes people who believe the same thing about the BIBLE are going to have different views on how to see it through...and that's okay.

It may not be clear how to implement what the Bible clearly commands...what is extremely CLEAR though is HOW we should be engaging with one another in our differences. And this is:

- With respect...
- In love...
- In kindness...
- Giving grace...
- Being civil...

We DON'T fight the same way the world fights! We don't name call and disrespect...we don't posture ourselves arrogantly, act foolishly or speak disrespectfully.

Remember, we represent Christ. We live for a future Kingdom that is to come. We keep our eyes on Jesus who according to Rev. 19:16 is coming again to establish HIS reign finally and fully – and he will take the title once and for all – “King of kings and Lord of lords.” and we will reign with him forever and ever.

THIS is the government we are waiting on! And so until that time...until it's initiated...under the government we are currently living in, we submit and obey...pray and preach...and influence and advocate in a way that HONORS and REFLECTS him.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.